



Christian Employment Articles

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Job Interviewing in a Tough Market

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Whoever is in charge of writing clichés deserves a pat on the back. How about, "It's always darkest before the dawn" or "keep a stiff upper lip." Or who could forget that perennial, "Tough times don't last, but tough people do"? Truth be told, if you're one of the roughly 15 million people in need of a job, you're hurting! And all the clichés in the world don't help. So, let's look at some practical ways to be heard above the crowd at that next job interview.

Having owned a marketing communications company for over 25 years, mine is a unique perspective. I was an employer, and I also taught clients how to market their products and businesses. If you're a job seeker you have a product to sell: You.

So, let's begin at the beginning. Any advertising pro will tell you that the trick to selling a product is twofold: Presenting a differential advantage (something that makes this product different and better than the competitors), and presenting a memorable, penetrating image of the product (we call this a product's branding.)

To impress your potential check signer, dazzle them with your uniqueness or your differential advantage. Never come to an interview unprepared. Learn everything you can about the company. In today's competitive job market this means going the extra mile.

Sure, all 50 of the other candidates have read the company brochure and done a quick Google search. It's your job to dig deeper. Read the most recent press releases you can find. Determine what the firm's biggest challenges and opportunities are today — not last year. Then have a clear, terse, concise presentation prepared (and rehearsed in the mirror) to share with your interviewer on exactly what you would do to cut costs, bolster market share, and increase sales.

With the conversation rolling, it's time to begin branding yourself favorably in this company's mind.

Note: I use the word "favorably" here for a reason. I can still remember employment interviews I conducted with people who branded themselves in all the wrong ways. I recall people wasting our time asking for jobs they were clearly not passionate about. I can recall sensing that some of these people were far more interested in a paycheck (what we could do for them) than a position (what they could do for us.) Guess what? I may never forget them, but I never hired them either.

Following are a few branding tips you may find handy:

Forget all you've heard about the "firm handshake." That's another one of those clichés. Sure, shake hands like you mean it — but don't try to destroy your interviewer's rotator cup! Overdone handshakes make you look foolish.

Don't arrive with a cot the night before. In other words, come to your appointment on time (about 5 minutes early).

Anything longer makes you look desperate.

Speaking of not looking desperate — don't! Interviewers can smell desperation — and it is not a hiring plus. Don't allow yourself to sound angry or scared. Even if times are tough, put on your game face and project a positive, upbeat, can-do spirit. People always respond best to smiling optimism. Remember, you're interviewer is part of the human race struggling with problems too. This is your opportunity to be remembered as the bright spot of her day.

Ask probing questions about the company and its vision for the future. Respond to those comments in ways that paint you as a part of that successful future.

Never, never, never talk negatively about your old boss. Need I say more?

Regarding salary — that's a bit trickier. Avoid it as long as possible. Build value before putting your hand out. If possible, wait for the job offer before discussing the money. But if you are asked, try something like, "I know the challenges of this economy. What do you feel is fair?"

Finally, follow up with a [thoughtful, handwritten "thank you."](#) Be sure to get the grammar correct — they will notice.

It may take time, but the right approach will pay off. In the meantime, remember the ancient words of Job, "Let him not deceive himself by trusting what is worthless, for he will get nothing in return." ([Job 15:31](#)) Our faith is in God.

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